

EDUCATION  
IN A  
DEMOCRACY

*By*

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# EDUCATION IN A DEMOCRACY

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## I.

### Toward a Definition

Education is a vast subject. Education in a Democracy is almost cosmic. Yet, since neither education nor democracy belongs to the realm of the imagination or the occult, one may be pardoned for attempting to state a few practical observations.

We, in Canada, possess a great national inheritance in education. The streams of French influence, the Loyalist tradition in the Maritimes, and the democratic ideal fostered by Egerton Ryerson, all meet today in what we call Canadian education. It grew out of the life of the nation. There was nothing exotic about it. Our common school system was established at a time when education was needed to save our national soul, to free us from inherited restraints, to establish social and political justice, to provide worthy incentives and useful skills suitable to a frontier community. We were passing into a democracy, a social and political partnership in a common national enterprise. An uneducated democracy was doomed. An educated democracy, trained in all types of schools, would answer the call of the new day—the call of ideals—and accept willingly high standards of character, conduct and public service.

Even Alfred the Great and his borrowed teachers knew, that "the State and the Church have a right to the service of the best brains of the community; that the whole body of the people, and not merely one particular class, ought to have a common culture and a common outlook." (Cyril Norwood). King Alfred and the friars established the place of

idealism in national education, the ideal that moral forces are dominant, a fact which we are in danger of neglecting. George Washington endeavoured to remind his country of this, when he emphasized virtue, learning and urbanity as the true ends of education. It is a truth which needs to be stated afresh in every new generation. It is the only adequate basis of education which will prevent the whole structure from falling apart, because it aims at a full-orbed, symmetrical life.

(i) Since this is an educational association, perhaps one ought to begin with a definition of words. I do not know, except in a general way, what a democracy is. It is, in a sense, a nation of people running around loose. They belong to so many sects, lodges, parties, clubs, societies and gangs, and are so thoroughly disguised by milliners, hair-dressers, tailors, photographers and society editors, that you often mistake the pooh-bah for a prince. But, in a general way, *a democracy is the progress of a people working together toward social and spiritual ends.* That being so, a soulless democracy is unthinkable. It is also obvious that *democracy is a point of view, an experience*, something that has to be acquired. Therefore, it is not a matter of all the people moving together, but rather a majority of the people recognising spiritual values as paramount, and determined to prove them and illustrate them in everyday social experience.

(ii) Neither can I define education. It is parcelled out into so many congeries of aims and methods, and cluttered up with so many national and community traits, administrative details, courses and com-

promises, that it escapes precise definition. No two nations agree, no two men. *Education is a guided and kindled growth toward self-realization.* But that is hardly it. Education is the discovery and training of latent powers, whereby child and adult are enabled to experience life within the limits of their capacities, to find their right work in the world, and to be useful and happy in it.

(iii) Rostand, in "Chanticleer," says: "I whose method was not to know how, but to be quite certain why." The definition, after all, is not the main thing. Enough to say, that *education must conserve, and somehow perpetuate enhanced, the moral, spiritual and intellectual achievements of the race as represented by the national community.* Enough that a *democracy* is the chance a free people offers, of realizing oneself fully as an individual, and of becoming completely oneself in the life of all.

Education can not create new faculties, but it can unify the faculties we possess, so that our view of a subject, a person, or a period may have unity also. Art is an illustration of how men see and treat of life as a whole. The educated man is likewise an artist. He can see and think and feel that the religious experience, science, politics, poetry and scholarship of an age are one with the social customs, manners, homes, furniture and dialect of that time—an authentic expression of their period.

Education, therefore, is not a budget of subjects; it is an "intelligent vitality, communicated to us from the vitality of others who are richly endowed with the gift of living, seeing, feeling." (Barton). Art, literature, the social and physical sciences and the crafts, are all allies of the growing social ideal. They make us more discriminating, more ripe, enrich our lives with new standards, increase our range, and make us live more happily together, because we have learned to enjoy and share a finer savour of life.

A moment ago we saw that education was an inward, a spiritual experience; that democracy was likewise a spiritual experiment. It was poor Malvolio who exclaimed: "I think nobly of the soul." One need not apologize for speaking about

the soul, or about spiritual values to educationists, the master-builders of a nation. Democracy waits upon education, and education depends upon a great moral aim, a spiritual purpose so exalted that the social life it creates is grand to contemplate. "An ancient thinker remarked, that primitive men advanced from the conception of living together for a livelihood, to the conception of living together for the good life." Thus we see that education is the art of living spiritually, and democracy is the community life of spiritual men and women lived artistically.

## II.

### This New Freedom

Each year we add something to our knowledge which bears upon these great problems of our lives. Each year we spend more thought, more care and more money upon them. But we are not dealing with pliable clay. A youth is not plasticine; he has his own ideas. He is swayed by strange desires, longs to express himself and get somewhere. It is as silly to blame him for his vigorous protests and futile cravings, as it is to denounce the unaccountable drift of society itself. Read the newspapers; you will glimpse the nature of the environment in which we live, and guess what the general public believes life is for, what we are all about.

The more we think about our work as educators of a democracy the more we wonder. "We are standing at the first flush of the dawn of civilization, and we are terribly inexperienced beings." (Sir James Jeans). A good many believe that democracy is a farce, and all wrong. But cynicism helps not at all. We are committed to democracy, and cannot turn back if we would. Yet the experiment grows more complex and dangerous, as you well know.

The "self-evident truths," about which democracy yesterday boasted, have today become fantastic and absurd in many cases.

(i) *Equality of opportunity* is a delusion, it no longer exists, a fact which is becoming more unpleasant and disturbing every year.

(ii) There is no use in blinking the fact that *self-determination* is likewise a

chimers. Business, and therefore a nation's sense of security, is in the hands of a ruthless oligarchy, which does not scruple to shackle a people in economic slavery or send them to the shambles of war. "The King's argument was, that anything that had a head could be beheaded." (Lewis Carroll).

(iii) The doctrine that *all men are free and equal* before the law has filled society with a welter of desires, ambitions and protests. This new freedom is no figment of the imagination; it is a stern fact, and also a disquieting one. Like Frankenstein, we have made a monster which we can scarce control. Social and aesthetic ideals help, but they are not enough, as the careers of Jude the Obscure and the Mayor of Casterbridge make clear. Our freedom and our multiplying responsibilities often prove our undoing, while more knowledge only adds to our dismay.

(iv) *Emanicipation of the working classes* means, that all men shall be free to express themselves intelligently and creatively, being free to choose what they will do and under what conditions, and how they will live. But it simmers down to economic and social freedom. That is going only part way. The mechanization and brutalization of life by industry has not been greatly relieved since the days of Shaftesbury. The process has only become more subtle and sophisticated.

A generation is growing up which has been taught to believe that *work is wealth*. The old Puritan virtues of industry and practical reason have degenerated, as Tawney shows, into our present insensate commercialism. Pleasure has become confused with excitement; knowledge with short-cuts; values with dollars. We followed Karl Marx and gave the *under dog* a chance, only to find that, when the proletariat had a chance, they were no less savage than their old masters. We followed Rousseau, and sent the whole nation to school. We believed his *liberist* about freedom, with the result that the world has gone the limit and lost its poise. Schools are bulging with elective courses and opportunities for free self-expression. Yet, we know that if we fail to increase our depth and range, let alone miss the

true meaning of life and character, we shall scarcely be justified in seeking to express ourselves, no matter how free we are or how numerous the opportunities.

Fortunately there is in man, as well as in society as a whole, a safety balance-wheel. Men know when they have had enough. Up to a point they cheer on the devastating and insane show, but one day they hesitate amid the tumult. They begin to suspect that they have been cut off from the sources of satisfying power, and from the happiness that endures. The tide of life runs meaning to the sea, leaving the beaches desolate and bare; but the tide comes flooding in again, answering as ever to our prayers.

Yeaklee has pointed out why our progress is so slow: (i) we are content with the kind of education we possess; (ii) we are suspicious of the kind of education which others want. In other words, dogmatism holds us back; it mesmerizes and chloroforms our best efforts. We drive autos, golf balls and the hired man, but we would rather die than think. By popping up routine we delude ourselves into fancying that the strenuous life is the full and rich life.

George Bernard Shaw has declared that, "The democratic idealism of the XIX century is dead as a door nail." I will not admit that it is dead, only in need of surgical repair. The great crises of life, individual and social, prove clearly enough that idealism is still alive, that a heart does "beat beneath the ribs of death." The problem is, how may we mobilize effectively this latent love and idealism, and join it permanently to *worthful ends*? Lord Grey sums up the wisdom of the great social reformers in these words: "It is of the essence of democracy that all classes have their share in it." As time goes on even the vast army of the unemployed must also learn how to share in the common enterprise. "Produce! Produce! Even though it were the pitifullest, infinitesimal fraction!" Carlyle's strident command mocks those who want work and cannot find any. Production has far outdistanced consumption—that is, the fabrication of necessities and luxuries adequate to our needs. Even men

who have permanent employment are, as the years go on, likely to have shorter working hours, with time to burn on their hands. This growing margin of leisure, added to the forced idleness of a multitude that can "only stand and wait," offers democracy a herculean task. How may a man serve, let alone keep his feet, while he stands and waits? The world cannot very well enter a monastery. Perhaps education can bring the cloister to the world, and offer a chance to those who, while they cannot produce in Carlyle's sense, may give us that without which men and nations perish.

### III.

#### The Dark Places of Education

Dr. Willi Schohaus, in "The Dark Places of Education," takes these words of Pestalozzi for his text: "The essentials of a good school are the same as those that are necessary for all human happiness, and nothing else than the true wisdom of life." It seems to me that we are approaching an answer to our question as to the nature of education in a democracy. But first let us look at these dark places, which the eminent Swiss educationist and trainer of teachers has discovered.

In the first place he points out, that *we are ridden to death by all sorts of daemons*. The housewife is not mistress of a home, but the house tyrannizes over her. The operator of a street car begins as a public servant, and ends as a small tyrant from a sense of his importance. The army was created for protection, and becomes master. Parliament was conceived as a council chamber where the people, through their representatives, spoke together. It often tends to become a dictator of the people. Machines were invented as tools, and have become tyrants. So the struggle goes on, man trying to wrest himself from the mastery of things, and struggling to keep his soul on top. Even in education the trend becomes obvious. What by its very nature was meant to be flexible, idealistic, experimental, rich and democratic, Schohaus says, often becomes rigid, traditional, aloof and self-sufficient. It abounds, he

thinks, in smugly school-masterish dictators, deficient in humour, too sufficient in exaggerated discipline and specialization, and swelling with a pompous arrogance, bred from the disparaging difference in knowledge between themselves and their students.

Again, Schohaus declares, that we hire names with teaching diplomas, unsight and unseen, when our children require personalities to teach them in order that *they may become persons*. It has been said, that one of the greatest honors the Church does a community, when it assigns a minister or priest to a parish, is to place among the people a scholar and a gentleman. The Department of Education aims to do the same thing, train and certificate scholars as well as ladies and gentlemen. That community is fortunate where the priest and the teacher join hands, for their work is similar, even to the spiritual nature of their avocations.

Again he affirms, that *our instruction is often too general and academic*. School boards increase the pressure upon the Departments for extensions of the program in all directions. Fortunes are spent to provide accommodation, equipment and instruction in millinery and multiplying subjects, which are totally unrelated to the real educational program in any vital way. This has its corollary in the so-called academic curriculum. Teachers would prefer to reduce the number of subjects, and spend more time on the essentials; trustees and school boards are eager to keep pace with new theories about administration and the supposed new demands of modern life. The result is a whirligig of class-periods, mostly unrelated to any central purpose. Schohaus would put the results of it something like this. "The cow is a domestic animal. Gophers are rodents and wasters. The United Empire Loyalists were expatriated scholars and gentlemen. The North West Mounted Police always get their man. Honesty is the best policy. The good child loves his brothers and sisters, and tells his mother everything. If you know all this you will be marked very good!"

Many children suspect the smugness and hypocrisy of all that. They feel that

personality has some rights. But they observe, also, that society is built upon similar principles of standardized behaviour, instruction, and the subordination of the individual to the class-spirit. They learn early to assume an attitude of self-confidence, and imagine that it is not necessary to know a great deal in order to become a connoisseur of art and music, to acquire superior manners or the correct pronunciation of a few French idioms. Are there not little handbooks that can expound the secret of personality for a few cents? Encyclopaedias of quotations can be bought on the instalment plan, which will make you glisten like a wit and savant in any society. You can master the piano or saxophone so thoroughly in six lessons that the crowd will cup their ears to catch the magic. And how easy it is to get along in the world if you care that dandruff, halitosis and pink tooth brush, and smoke a sun-kist cigarette!

#### THE GOALS OF LEARNING:

And so I come back to my old-fashioned ideas about education. The goal of learning is wisdom, or ripeness if you will. The goal of learning is goodness, a man who is decent, profoundly honest with himself and sympathetic with others. The end of learning is happiness, and by happiness I mean the mature stability, harmony and poise of a man in relation to the facts of life, the life about him as well as the life within his own soul. We arrive at these ends through healthy curiosity; by following with understanding the great quests of the race; by infinite pains and patience; and by comradeship with wise minds and beautiful spirits. History and the social sciences are futile, unless they show the steep ascent by which the race has come, and appraise the ideals and ideas which have motivated men. Mathematics and the physical sciences are useless, except they teach law and order, and show how life, to be complete and happy, must submit to the discipline of both inner and outer laws.

#### ACADEMIC VERSUS PRACTICAL:

I have no doubt but that we shall arrive at a fresh discovery of the old humanities, and put them to new and sig-

nificant uses. The one-sidedness of the old academic program was apparent; yet it aimed, with some success, to make children think and see and feel and hear, to use their powers (all of them) and to retain their spiritual freedom. The first High School appeared in England, in 1848, in Germany in 1849, and later in Denmark. The new movement was extended to institutes of all sorts, workingmen's colleges, co-operatives of many kinds, and as many educational unions as there were trades and guilds. With this new type of school the academic was kept as intact as the varying technical demands permitted. The classics were omitted, but the pupil studied history, literature and the rest, then went into the work-shop to acquire skill in wood-working, and so on. The academic and the practical were divorced and largely remain so. Yet there is no reason why the vocational program should not be cultural as a thing in itself. While making a wheel in the carpenter shop, the whole process of civilization can be opened up. Civilization has revolved upon wheels. They will take you back to the Vedic Hymns, to the war chariots of Solomon and the Shepherd Kings of Egypt 3500 years ago, to the pageants and commerce of Rome, the inventions of Archimedes and Leonardo da Vinci, to the entire romance of commerce, industry and social custom since the Bronze Age. Yet, the other day in Toronto, a technical school bought a \$10,000 machine, and consequently had to disperse with courses in music because of the depletion of the government appropriation.

#### IV.

##### Foreign Experiments in Education

In order that we may gauge our own attainments in education, it would be well to consider a few foreign experiments which merit attention. Those which have taken place in Denmark, Germany and Russia are particularly noteworthy, but I have no time to go into them now.

These experiments in education show how a small army of teachers raised the economic and spiritual life of whole nations. They demonstrate how teachers in other lands have sensed new needs for

the new times, and have displayed a fine independence in reinterpreting the aims and methods of education to meet them. They illustrate how a new generation of teachers, alert, flexible, free and expectant, have transformed life about them. And why not? Education is for life, life at this present hour; education is life.

I saw a blackboard in a teacher-training institution not long ago. The legend, in neat capital letters, said: "TWENTY-EIGHT RULES FOR THE USE OF THE COMMA." There they were, all twenty-eight of them, and underneath in red chalk: "Do not erase."

This parliament of teachers is not for the purpose of such utterly wretched nonsense. Do you know why the golden age of Greece was golden, and how its precious metal glided all succeeding ages? And do you know how to go about building a golden age? That is what the experiments abroad are trying to solve.

Style, said Buffon, is the man. Style is rather the man when man is an artist. But style is also something which "belongs to a whole community, something which must exist before any important, individual style can emerge at all." (Barton). The Elizabethan style produced Shakespeare. The Gothic Cathedral flowered out of a rich and profound spiritual energy. Behind the style of an age and a society lies the style of its teachers. The visible style of the age is part and parcel of their being. The national character, that vital and ideal grace which distinguishes it from other countries, is the mind and spirit of its school masters.

#### THE ENGLISH TRADITION:

I should like to consider the trends in England, but must refer you instead to "The English Tradition of Education," by Cyril Norwood. There are three statements in this book I must not miss.

(i) The Master of Harrow says, that in the England of Queen Elizabeth's day, like old Athens, education and citizenship were both felt to be real. But that whereas England, delivered from Spain, flowered in Shakespeare, Great Britain, delivered from German hegemony, and

both educated and industrialized, has flowered in no art, music or drama. (p. 7). The indictment is rather too sweeping. The real reason for it he hints later on, when he says that, if we would produce the *Tempest*, with real ships, a real lake and a real storm, people would come to see the spectacle, but not to hear the music of Ariel or to dream with Prospero. Having put our trust in external things, we are in danger of living on the surface. The Hollywood mind is not a mind at all; its music is crooning insanity; its dreams only nightmares. How can a people, fed on such humbug, delight in the ripeness and sophistication, the music and magic of *The Tempest*, or ever offer a fertile soil for beauty, wisdom and reverence?

(ii) Dr. Norwood stands for what we regard as best in the old tradition. He can see plainly enough the fallacy in what was called, the "grand old fortifying tradition of the classical system," but he is no less aware of the equal uselessness of much that passes as vocational training. He sees in our present system of education the splendid instrument that it is, in spite of all its defects; yet he does not suppose, as Arnold did not, that it is for all. If it is to fit a boy for life, it presupposes mental alertness and curiosity. A good many have neither. But the main thing is that education is an *individual process*, and we are apt to lose sight of this truth, which if lost all is lost.

(iii) And just because he rests his case upon the individual, his growth and his ripeness, Norwood is not afraid to speak of *religion*. And that is the other point I wished to have you remember about him. He says that English boarding schools and Roman Catholic schools have no reason to be ashamed that the chapel stands at the centre. Arnold of Rugby was the first Protestant educationist to see the logical connection between education and religion, and his aim was to make his scholars both Christians and gentlemen. Norwood of Harrow declares, in this year of grace, that reverence is *the great thing*. He does not define it, but we all know what reverence is. It is that divinity in



the soul of man which recognizes the great imponderables—love, beauty, truth and goodness—wherever it may find them, and, when once beheld, compels that man to uncover his head and kneel. All education has its roots in religion, and there is no need to apologise for stating a fact. As Ruskin showed, expression is not a matter of grammar and syntax, but its roots are moral; style is not a trick, but the flowering of the spirit; reason gets nowhere except faith give it wings.

## V.

### Education in a Democracy

Many of you are tired and bewildered. You have shared in the fight for a new ideal of humanity, a crusade as real as those in the trenches knew, and you have often felt the clammy hand of defeat. Many of you are young, and have known nothing but a world in chaos—war, unrest, and depression.

The noise of the mechanized world reaches the ears of many people as a wail of despair, a cry of futility. They see a world shaken by industrial revolution, quivering on the brink of chaos. They see power taken from those who had leisure, learning and urbanity, and given to proletariat and plutocrat, and they cry, "Away with it!"

It must be obvious, however, that there is no way of halting mechanical invention. And who would desire it? Sooner or later man will become master of the machine. I will not believe that applied science is a backward movement, or that there is anything inherently evil in the mass production of can-openers and garden rakes. I fear rather mass production in thought and character, the wholesale manufacture of spiritual and intellectual robots, of moral ciphers. But there is no need of that, if people are not too stupid to think, too craven to feel for themselves. Those who are will, as always, flee from the bewildering freedom modern life affords, and for safety's sake range themselves in the queues of fashion and prejudice.

There are already signs that democracy is regaining its dignity and poise. There

are many indications which prove that we are moving in the right direction. Humanity, now as ever, refuses to be regimented and standardized. Man is an artist, and the artist in his soul demands freedom. It also rebels against tawdry, flippant, vulgarity and insincere, crooning sentimentality. The man who invented the machine knows how to throttle it, and save himself from going over the precipice. But he needs the teacher at his elbow to show him how he, having saved his skin, may save his soul beside.

There is no reason for dismay. The artist in man that demands freedom to live, select, arrange and give emphasis according to his heart's desire, will discover the unity life needs, some centre about which to integrate his experience, some high goal worth his striving.

In ancient civilizations art, music, literature, science, religion and patriotism were one and the same thing. A man might live in a hovel, but his soul dwell on the Acropolis. The temple in Athens or Memphis, Jerusalem or Rome, symbolized the essential unity of all thought and experience in an overwhelming objective fact. It was the embodiment of everything that contributed to the enrichment of life.

We are rediscovering all this. We are becoming increasingly aware of the solidarity of mankind, of the oneness of all experience. Even the curriculum is being rebuilt with this new ideal in mind, geography passing over into history, history into citizenship and science, and all of them into literature and the arts and the art of living. The north pinnacle of the great west front of Lincoln Cathedral is surmounted by a statue of the little swineherd of Stow, who gave all his life's savings toward the building of the edifice. Art and religion overcame class prejudice. Fear not, man will arrive, and every school house is a guarantee of that destiny.

Young and old are restless with a terrible nostalgia; they are homesick for the real land of the heart's desire. It seems to me, that when education honestly attempts to place the demands of the spirit in their proper place, we shall come nearer the great discovery. It may be

long before the chapel will be restored to all the schools, yet we need not wait for that. Democracy is a spiritual experience; education is a spiritual enterprise. When the note of divinity returns to the classroom, we shall not only have that integration of our educational system which we require, but will possess that incentive and purpose, that reverence and healing without which there can be neither learning nor urbanity, neither character nor any real aristocracy. Without this, education and democracy are doomed; with this, every man shall succeed to his birthright vocation and avocation.

We cannot hope, neither do we desire, to "reproduce the feudal unity or the intellectual standpoint of the cathedral building age. The only hope for our civilization is a hope that something in the way of an imaginative, contagious fraternity may once more possess the spirit of man. . . Civilization in the XVIII. century sense is dead. . . A new civilization, if there is to be one, must have a nucleus; and this nucleus can only be found in the new natural aristocracy, the growing class of the intelligent. . . Spread through all degrees of wealth and social position, this class is capable of taking a wider view of things than has ever been possible to any class that holds its position only by birth, or by money, or by votes. Education, among this new class, is regarded as a means to life, not as a social lever or label. Labels are of slight account with people who are interested in real things. . . Whatever pessimists may say, our age has seen the birth of a remarkable new spirit: a spirit of wise, ungrudging and disinterested sympathy among the people to whom the things of the mind are really important, and who assign to such things a religious value for the future of humanity." ("Purpose and Admiration." J. E. Barton).

And so I salute you men and women, the elite, the master architects and shepherd kings of the new democracy.

I have endeavoured to restate and clarify the real nature and true purpose of education. I have also tried to relate the educational enterprise to our task of nation building so obviously, that you will gain a fresh and challenging glimpse of the greatness of your apostolate, and take hold with new courage. You will have seen that it is not a system of education into which you are caught up and trapped, but rather that it is a way of life, a spiritual experience if you will, in which you are interpreters and kindlers of all that is deathless. You will grow as the need grows, and change when change makes old aims and methods obsolete and uncouth. Beauty there is, and love and truth in abundance, yet they await you. You will know where to find them, how to interpret them, adorn them and keep them alive in the lives of men. Perhaps our own Francis Sherman has given the best expression of all this:

*Let us rise up and live! Behold, each thing  
Is ready for the moulding of our hand.  
Long have they all awaited our command;  
None other will they ever own for king.  
Until we come no bird dare try to sing,  
Nor any sea its power may understand;  
No buds are on the trees; in every land  
Year asketh year some tidings of some  
Spring.*

Yea, it is time,—high time we were awake!  
Simple indeed shall life be unto us.  
What part is ours?—To take what all  
things give;  
To feel the whole world growing for our  
sake;  
To have sure knowledge of the marvellous;  
To laugh and love.—*Let us rise up and  
live!*

(Matins).



